

Comparative Guide to American Hospitals: 4,200 Hospitals with Key Personnel and 17 Quality Measures in Treating Heart Attack, Heart Failure and Pneumonia

Editorial director: Laura Mars-Proietti; Millerton, NY: Grey House Publishing; ISBN 1-59237-109-4; 1,326 pages, \$225

This book compares 4,203 American hospitals based on their care of patients with three critical conditions (heart attack, heart failure and pneumonia). Data were retrieved from voluntary reports obtained for Hospital Compare, a federal study.

This book begins with a concise user's guide. The hospital rankings and profiles are derived from compliance with 17 quality measures, which supposedly represent the best treatment practices. A statistical summary shows how the hospitals compare with each other. Information is classified alphabetically by state, but one can jump directly to a specific hospital by using the index or the summary section. Information is also given about beds and key personnel. It is certainly useful to find so much information in one source.

A weakness of this book is the lack of complete information for several hospitals caused by small number of cases, or missing or inaccurate data. For example, no data are given for "Thrombolytic Agent Received" under the California summary, and "PTCA Received" numbers are given for only one hospital in California (page 76). Moreover, no explanation is given about the missing summary data (e.g., zero report). The editors could have tried to get the missing data by following up with the subject hospitals.

I must add a word of caution for the lay public. Hospital rankings in this book do not necessarily reflect the overall quality of patient care. Consistent with the etymology of "hospital" (hospitale: hospice, guest house), hospital quality assessment criteria must include measures of nursing care (including attention to hygiene, comfort, food, noise and lighting) and overall patient satisfaction. The rankings in this book do not take these crucial issues into consideration. Also, no attention has been given to other hospital departments, such as trauma, surgery, obstetrics, mental illness, radiology, oncology and ancillary services. Thus, this book cannot guide patients in choosing a specific hospital for

their own care, for which they should still depend on their attending physician's advice.

With 1,326 pages of rather ordinary paper quality, this paperback's \$225 price is towards the upper end of the range for similar references. Overall, this encyclopedia will be useful as a reference book for researchers and health-care marketers. It certainly was not intended for the practicing physician's bookshelf. Its utility would be enhanced by the inclusion of a compact disc.

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